Exchange For the Soul

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MARK 8:37

"WHAT SHALL A MAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS SOUL?"

The business of the world is, in its last analysis, a mere matter of the exchange of commodities. Your surplus of wheat would be exchanged for my surplus of corn or cattle. In ancient times, and in the less accessible portions of the earth today, this was and is literally true. I am told that in the great valley of the Congo, where our mission to the Black races is meeting with such marvelous success, you can buy a house, or a piece of land, or even a wife for one or many bolts of highly colored cloth.

The general use of money, though existing to a limited degree long ago, is of more modern origin. Yet in highly developed countries like the U. S. A. and Great Britain it is said that from 95% to 98% of the total volume of business is transacted without the exchange of a dollar in actual cash. It is by an exchange of credits—the use of checks or drafts.

Some years ago on a railroad platform in North Carolina, I witnessed a scene that was both novel and unforgettable. It was the sale of a railroad. The auctioneer, shivering in the winter's cold and confronted by a semi-circle of prominent railroad men, read the order of court directing the sale and then called for bids. In five minutes, or less, the entire transaction was completed and a railroad which began at Tidewater and thrust its steel rails into the red hills of the west, with its road-bed, its rolling stock, its stations, money and all other assets changed hands. Yet all that there was to represent this great transaction was a slip of paper—a check.

But there is one thing I have never seen or heard offered for sale—an immortal soul. True, men and

women, too, more's the shame, do sell soul both and body for gold, but they would angrily resent the charge if it were laid against them.

I have stood in the great Stock Exchange in New York, where billions change hands every day. On one wall hung a great board, on which scores of railroad stocks and bonds were listed. On the opposite wall were listed other scores of industrial stocks. While down on the floor buyers and sellers were shouting like madmen. It was a memorable scene.

But nowhere have I seen or heard this offer made: An immortal soul for sale: What will you give?

We must keep clearly in mind that man is a dual being. He is composed of body and soul, of flesh and spirit. The body perishes and mingles again with the dust whence it sprang. The soul is imperishable. Yet at its maker's command it is loosed from its tenement of clay and is borne out on invisible wings to stand in the presence of the Judge of all the earth to give an account of the deeds that are done in the body.

Yet the needs of the body are so constant and so clamorous, so insistent and persistent, that they too often throw into the back-ground the equally urgent but far less noisy needs of the soul.

Here is a man, you have seen him and so have I, who gives meticulous care to the health of the body. At the first serious sign of disorder he calls for the Doctor, or goes to a hospital or a rest-cure. He spares no expense to assure a restoration to health. But this same man will often give no more care to the health of his soul than do the cattle that graze upon a thousand hills.

Here is a mother, you have seen her, so have I, fretted and frightened by some sickness of a beloved child. She summons the Doctor, or rushes to the hospital, ready to spend her money like water for the

restoration of the child's health. Yet, in many cases, she gives far less thought, to the spiritual welfare and training of that child than she would give to the training of a blooded colt or a pedigreed pup.

The things that are seen and temporal too often overshadow the things which are unseen but eternal.

Take these physical bodies of ours. One of the most marvelous of God's creations is the human body. Within our bosoms there is a heart that is the only earthly example of perpetual motion. It throbs away day and night, hot or cold, sick or well, driving the blood with the speed of a mill-race to the extremities of the body, and then draws it back through the lungs to be revitalized by the life-giving oxygen and then on through vein and artery again—and all without the touch of human hand or the guidance of the mind.

We carry within our bodies a marvelous chemical laboratory that without the touch of human hand takes the food we eat and transforms it into flesh and blood and bone, into nerve and muscle and brain. And so with other qualities of the body which we will not pause to enumerate. For these bodies are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made.

Yet wonderful as it is the body is not an end in itself, but a means to a higher and nobler end. For the body is designed to be the temple of an immortal spirit fashioned in the image of God. But it has a higher function even than this for the Apostle (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19-20) tells us that these bodies of flesh are designed by God to be the Temple of the Holy Ghost. "Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God. Which Temple ye are. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's."

Notwithstanding man in his stupidity and blindness, because distorted by sin, so neglects and maltreats both body and soul that the glorious image of

the Creator has been sadly defaced, and sometimes almost effaced, and man has sunk very low from his original high estate.

Naturally this is far more obvious in pagan than in Christian lands where the uplifting influence of the Gospel is powerfully felt.

The pagans either deify or despise. They deify their kings and other great men while in their view the masses exist for the pleasure or profit of their so-called betters. They even build temples in honor of their very great and worship them as God. On a beautiful hillside above Nikko, and in a handsome grove of cryptomerias, I visited two splendid temples erected in honor of two of the greatest heroes of Japan. Thither, every year, the Emperor, and thousands of others, come to worship the spirits of the men supposed to be here enshrined. But I have also seen the dead body of a peasant lying in the streets of Canton, "unwept, unhonored, and unsung," and with none so poor as to do him reverence.

A traveler was making his way across the vast plains of South Africa. In the early afternoon he came to the house of a settler which he was seeking, and as he approached the house he saw a lad, perhaps twelve years of age, throwing pebbles against the house and catching them on the rebound. But one stone glanced to the side and rolled to the stranger's feet. He picked it up and was about to toss it back with a pleasant jest, when something about the stone caught his eye, for he was an *expert* in precious stones. In that rough pebble, bruised and scarred and stained with the touch of earth, he recognized a diamond of priceless value. This was the beginning of the discovery of the famous diamond mines of Kimberley—the richest in all the earth.

In the same way the soul of man has through sin and selfishness and all unrighteousness, been stained

and scarred, bruised and broken sometimes almost beyond all recognition. But when there was no other eye to pity and no other arm to save, Christ Jesus came to earth to re-discover the bruised and battered soul that was lost, and to restore it to something of its pristine beauty and power.

For after all the soul is the thing of supreme value. The body perishes and returns to the dust, but the soul lives on through the countless ages of eternity.

> What is the thing of greatest price,
> The whole creation round?
> That which was lost in Paradise,
> That which in Christ is found.
>
> The soul of man—Jehovah's breath,
> That keeps two worlds at strife.
> Hell moves beneath to work its death.
> Heaven stoops to give it life.

But man in his pride and folly is reluctant to confess his lost estate. But we cannot act as final Judge in this matter. Our selfish opinion is nothing worth. Christ Jesus is the final Arbiter, for at his footstool we must stand in the last great day of accounts. And Christ says that without Him and His great sacrifice the sinner is lost.

Listen: "The son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost"—not that which may some day become lost.

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God *abideth on Him*" (present tense).

In the fifteenth chapter of Luke, one of the most beautiful and best loved chapters in all the Gospels, three parables are recorded. They have been finely called "The Parables of Recovery"—the lost sheep,

the lost silver, the lost son. The emphasis is on the finding of that which was lost. The father of the Returning Prodigal sums up the case for all when he declares: "This my son was dead and is alive again: *he was lost and is found.*"

Since then Christ tells us in clear and pointed terms that apart from Him the sinner is lost. The great question of our text imperatively demands an answer: "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul" that is lost? How shall he buy it back? The question brooks no delay for the answer is fraught with life or with death. Men blinded by sin and self have given many answers—but never the right one. They have tried many things, but have neglected the one thing needful.

Here is one who says: I sold my soul for lust, or drink, or for the less revolting forms of earthly pleasure. Now I will buy back my soul by punishing the body, beating it with whips and scorpions, and so let it pay the price of former indulgence.

Chas. Reade in one of his delightful volumes tells of an atractive young monk whose conscience was heavily burdened with a sense of guilt. He tried in many ways to lift the load but in vain. Then he went out into the woods and cut many branches of a thorny shrub and carried them to the cave where he had taken up his abode as part of his penance, and made his bed upon the thorns. They pricked his body and caused the blood to flow and gave him acute pain, but his sense of guilt was not lifted. No, not in this way does pardon lie.

The Hindoo Mother is taught that if she will fling her helpless babe into the swift-moving waters of the Sacred Ganges she will find peace and joy in giving "the fruit of her body for the sin of her soul." She stands fearful and reluctant on the river's brink, and at last throws her child into the swift-flowing river

and sees it borne away on the whirling tide, or perhaps devoured by crocodiles before her eyes. But she finds no peace but instead has the bitter knowledge that she has murdered the child of her bosom.

Martin Luther, the great Reformer, to whom, with Calvin, Knox, Zwingli, Melancthon and a few others, Europe is indebted, under God, for whatever of good it possesses today, was, until nearly 35 years of age, a monk of the Roman Catholic Church. With a tender conscience he subjected himself to all the penance and fasting that his church prescribed. He knelt on his bare knees on the cold stone floor of his cell. He counted his beads. He repeated his Pater Nosters. He fasted long and often but he found no peace. At last he decided to make a pilgrimage to Rome the holy city of the Romish Church. And so across the hills and valleys of Germany he walked, through the Black Forest where danger and death threatened him at every turn. Across the snow-clad Alps, and down into the sunny plains of Italy he passed until at last he entered the gates of Rome.

On one of the lofty hills of Rome stood a famous church with 700 stone steps leading from the street below to its doors. On his bare knees he climbed step by step, knelt at the altar, and counted his beads, and repeated his Pater Nosters; and returned to the street on his bare knees—torn and bruised and bleeding.

Eight years ago in the city of Montreal, I witnessed a scene like this. A poor deluded penitent was seeking peace by climbing on his knees the stone steps that led up to the church on the hill-top. But though Luther's knees, like his, were torn and bruised and bleeding from contact with the rough stone there was no peace in his heart. And Luther found none until his hungry soul grasped the great meaning of the Apostle's words: "The justified *by Faith* shall live," and grasped also his answer to the Jailer at Philippi:

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and Thou shalt be saved." Not for penance done, not for works of righteousness performed, but "the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin."

But another who has not heard this word of the beloved Apostle will answer: I sold my soul for gold—with gold I will redeem it.

I will establish a mission station in China; or I will build an orphanage where fatherless children may be gathered and trained; or I will build a church where the word of God may be proclaimed. I was walking the streets of a southern city one day with a friend and he pointed to a great brick building across the street saying with a touch of cynicism, "That is Mr.——'s Concience." This man had amassed a fortune by hardfisted dealing, and a cynical public thought he was trying to quiet his conscience by building a church. It is, in truth, a beautiful and a most gracious thing to share our income with God and his work. He accepts it as a welcome and proper thing if done in loving gratitude, for a religion that does not touch the pocketbook is scarcely skin-deep. But it is a sordid and ghastly thing to imagine that Heaven can be bought with gold. Though you had the wealth of a Carnegie, and on top of that the millions of Rockefeller, and then added the millions of Henry Ford until your dollars touched the clouds, you could not purchase one hour of heavenly bliss, or lessen by a single pang the pains and penalties of the lost.

What, then, shall a man give in exchange for his soul? The question is a rhetorical one and demands a negative reply. What shall I give? Nothing under the broad expanse of the heavens, nothing within the wide reaches of the earth can make the guilty conscience clean, or wash away your sins.

The only answer to a lost soul is the Cross on Calvary's Hill. The only price that can be offered

has been fully paid in the golden coinage of the skies. For, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us—the just and for the unjust."

Dr. A. J. Brown, long the beloved Secretary of Foreign Missions of the Northern Presbyterian Church, was visiting the missions of his Church in the Near East. He came to Beyrout, where they have a very extensive work. He was reading one day on an upper porch overlooking the street when the clock struck the hour of noon. Straightway, the Muezzin came out on the Minaret of the Mosque across the street and uttered his hollow helpless cry: "There is no God but Allah and Mahomet is his prophet." Instantly the faithful on the sidewalks, in the middle of the street, in the bazaars, or in the homes knelt and repeated the hopeless and helpless cry: "There is no God but Allah, and Mahomet is His Prophet." When their voices died away on the waiting air, there was borne up to him from the basement below the sound of children's voices singing the Gospel Hymn:

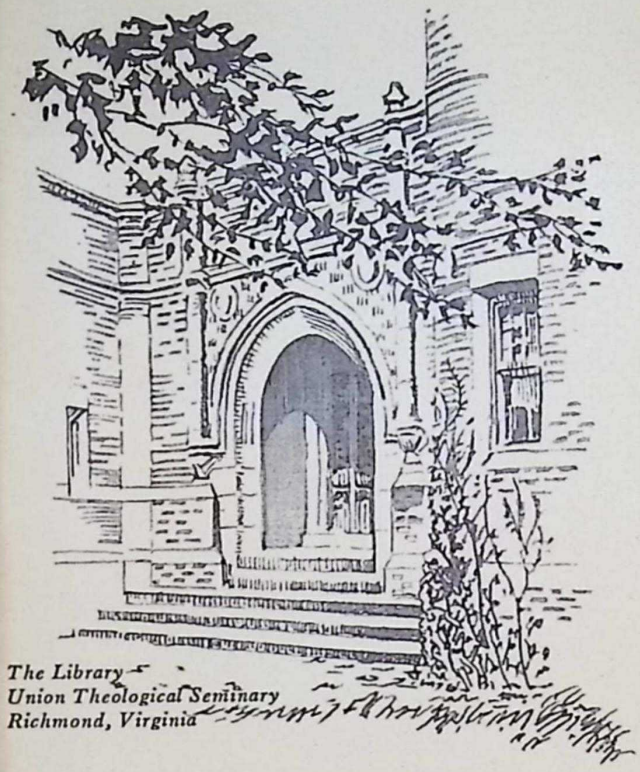
Jesus paid it all;
All to Him I owe:
Sin had left a crimson stain.
He washed me white as snow.

Come to Him, then, today with this prayer upon your lips:

"Nothing in my hands I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

And come without delay, for "He is able, he is willing." Doubt no more.

Come now: for "there's danger and death in delay."



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